

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF DOMINANT  
AGRARIAN RELATIONS AND CLASS BASIS  
OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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# CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF DOMINANT AGRARIAN RELATIONS AND CLASS BASIS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

G.P. Mishra

The history of social evolution and development underlines two things : firstly, material production is the starting point for all social existence; and secondly, the process of material reproduction is the basis of development for all societies, whether they are primitive or modern, contemporary or of the past.<sup>1</sup> Hence growth defined as 'a sustained increase in output' is essential for the development of any type of societies. But the nature or character of social development depends on the social context of growth in which as the process of production, it takes place in a society. The social context of growth cannot be ascertained or understood unless the economic conditions in which output is produced and increases over a period of time are historically examined.

"What we understand by economic conditions which we regard as the determining basis of the history of society are the methods by which human beings in a given society produce their means of subsistence and exchange the products among themselves (in so far as division of labour exists). Thus the entire technique of production and transport is here included. According to our conception this technique also determines the method of exchange and, further, the division of products and with it, after the dissolution of tribal society, the division into classes also and hence the relations of lordship and servitude and with the state,

politics, law etc. Under economic conditions are further included the geographical basis in which they operate and those remnants of earlier stages of economic development which have actually been transmitted and have survived after only through traditions or the force of inertia; also of course the external milieu which surrounds this form of society".<sup>2</sup> The economic conditions which are a conjuncture of forces of production and production relations (i.e. class relations in production) are regarded as 'the factor which ultimately determines historical development' (i.e. economic development) and 'political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc. development is based on economic development'.<sup>3</sup> Thus given economic conditions, there exists a given socio-economic structure of production in a society and the latter shows how dominant (and alternatively dependent) social relations dialectically appear and function in the process of production and how finally they determine the process of social development.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the characteristic features of dominant and dependent class relations in rural society; and thereby, an attempt is also made to show how their interrelationships and interactions in production have historically formed the basis of development in the rural economy of modern India. These two taken together will, in turn, reflect why the rural poor remain poor in rural India.

In view of the above idea, the thematic structure of this paper is based on the following : (a) concept of dominant class; (b) feudalism and dominant class; (c) policy, programmes and class

relations; and (d) why rural poor remain poor.

# I Concept of Dominant Class

A class may be called dominant if a group of people possess power or capacity to rule or dominate over other groups in a society. But the question is : How and why does this class dominate over other groups in the rural society?

The dominant caste-theory<sup>4</sup> may reply to this question by showing that in a caste-ridden agrarian society, there exists a dominant caste in terms of both, numerical as well as material strength and so the people of that caste dominate over the rest of the rural population. The exponents of the rich peasant theory of development<sup>5</sup> find a group of peasantry, coming from different castes, is dominant because the peasants in this group enjoy or command a major part of economic power by reaping the benefits of development and accumulate and build a position of dominance in the rural society. There may also be another explanation to this concept, according to which some group of the rural people is dominant because of the possession of all three; social status, power and wealth in the rural society.<sup>6</sup> All these conceptual explanations are static, mechanical and ahistorical. Whether it is the dominant caste or rich peasants or the group possessing status, power and wealth; all of them come from within a given socio-economic structure of production which identifies a given mode of production and it is this mode of production on which the class basis of both, ideology as well as production gets formed in the society. At the first instance, in a broader sense, the



concept of dominant social structure is identified with the ruling class which forms the ideological basis of social development.

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas : i.e. class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance".<sup>7</sup> Thus the ruling class in a given epoch conditions and determines the socio-economic structure of production. The ideas of this class which result from its dominating material relationships, form the ideological basis of social development. Herein lies the difference between the Marxian theory or concept of dominant class and the ahistorical subjective explanation of the dominant caste or rich peasants or social status-power-wealth-based theory of development. Moreover, the historical dynamics of social evolution and development present a dynamic concept of the ruling or dominant class in the sense that the character of this class changes with change in the socio-economic structure of production which forms the basis of the mode of production in a society.

In a given socio-economic structure of production, the ruling or dominant class presents 'a particular interest as general or

the general interests as ruling',<sup>8</sup> and thereby, the ruling class creates such a condition which subsumes the interests of other classes dependent on it. But this process is dialectical and the inherent contradictions arising from within the socio-economic structure wage war against the existing ruling class which changes its characteristic role by transforming the socio-economic structure of production in the society. It is the characteristic role of the dominant class which determines the social context of growth, i.e. the process of economic development.

## II Feudalism and Dominant Class

The most refined and advanced definitions of feudalism are to be found in Capital. The basis of the feudal society, as Marx points out, consists of the relations of personal dependence. "Personal dependence here characterises social relations of production just as it does the other spheres of life organised on the basis of that production".<sup>9</sup> Labour here consequently figures in natural form. The socio-economic structure of production characterises the existence of lord-serf relations in production wherein the feudal form of property exists with a multitude of peasant allotments. The peasants cultivate land for the landlords with the help of traditional and primitive techniques; and in return they get a portion of output for consumption and the rest is appropriated by the land owners. Thus "feudal production is characterised by division of the soil amongst the greatest possible number of sub-feudatories",<sup>10</sup> for these are the foundations of feudal states.



Feudal property (which is the sum total of economic relations) covered not only landed property, but also the town with its craft industry, regulated by guilds. However, the centre of gravity of the whole medieval feudal system was the countryside. And the organisation of town industry was determined, in essence, by general structure of feudalism, which was founded on 'landed property with serf labour chained to it'. Thus the socio-economic structure of feudal production was also the basis of production in the town.

In feudal society, the lords are the ruling or dominant class who control not only the source of material wealth but also the process of material production and the socio-economic structure. The existence of structural relations of personal dependence makes the peasants dependent on them. In other words, the domination of the land as an alien power over man and the serf being the adjunct of the land, and the creation of a social system of inter-personal bondage are the strength of the landlords for establishing themselves as the dominant or ruling class whose ideas form the ideology of development in feudal society.

All this presents a generalised picture about feudalism as one of the stages of development in the history of mankind. Feudalism as a stage of development in the history of India has its own characteristic forms and phases through which it came into being in medieval and British India.

According to Marx, the history of feudalism in different countries "assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders".<sup>11</sup> Let us take the case of Medieval

and British India. "The structural pattern of medieval India is still a matter for research, but it is already clear that it contained, alongside the dominant feudal structure, considerable residues of clan and tribes relations and partly of slavery, which in a number of regions made up structural patterns. It is also clear that elements of small commodity (with individual centres of capitalism) also existed, specially in urban crafts. Moreover, Indian feudalism itself took many different forms".<sup>12</sup> The feudal dominated multi-structured society of medieval India had three characteristic features : centralised power at the apex of its pyramidal social structure, village system in the countryside, and the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry. The village system and the union between agriculture and industry are the characteristic features of the Asiatic mode of production which was prevalent during the period of medieval India. But these characteristic features do not underscore the dominance of feudalism in medieval India. The despotic land revenue system and general administration bear an evidence to this fact. The dominant feudal structure was inter-wovenly based on the despotic relations with the Village Headman and Accountant in the countryside. The Jagirdari system is another example to show how the social structure was feudal dominated during the period of medieval India. Thus despotism based on the feudal dominated social structure had despotic feudal relations which created dominant or ruling class comprised the feudal lords, Jagirdars and Village Headman; and so the peasants, servants and small commodity producers were dependent on them.

The feudal structure of medieval India underwent changes during the colonial rule in British India. A short account of The British Rule in India by Marx shows how "England has broken the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing."<sup>13</sup> "This loss of the old World, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history."<sup>14</sup> The Indian social structure was ruined by the British not in the sense of ruining its feudal base but in terms of destroying its inner and spontaneously grown and operating ties between agriculture and industry having based on the internal structure of social relations and indigenous traditional technology. The destruction of handicraft industry by the British resulted in the expansion of merchant capital and money-lending coupled with heavy doses of land taxation. Certain metropolises were developed as the centres of trade through which raw materials were supplied to England from the periphery and the manufactured goods were imported to India from England for absorbing them into the colony. As a result, a characteristic pattern of economic relations developed between the metropolitan centre and the periphery. This pattern was again diversified and strengthened by the investors, traders, bankers, administrators and advisors who came to the country with a motive to turn their business and activities into the lasting sources of profit. Thus the colonial process of exploiting economic expansion led to the emergence of traders, merchants, money-lenders, and bureaucrats

as different social classes who were, at the first instance, integral parts of the colonial process of exploitation and oppression and also fired up a social organism antagonistic to feudalism in India.

Now look at the feudal society of rural India under the colonial rule. Without going into the historical details of how the form of feudalism changed or took another shape in British India, let us confine to what finally appeared on the rural scene in the countryside. In this case, it is better to have a look into the land revenue system prevailing in the country at the close of the 19th century of its colonial rule.

The system of land revenue was three-tier : the Zamindari, ryotwari and village settlement or communal ownership systems. This three-tier system of land revenue came into existence due to the introduction of a number of changes as a compromise to regional variations in the pattern of social relations in land ownership existing in the country; the objective of which was to intensify the feudal process of peasant exploitation. Marx regarded the Zamindari system as big landed proprietorship, the ryotwari system as petty individual and, principally, peasant land ownership, and the system of village land taxation in the then North-Western Provinces (Doab) as communal land ownership.<sup>15</sup> While exposing the British land revenue policy in India, he called the Zamindari and ryotwari system caricatures on private land ownership, although even in this case he wrote of two distinct forms of private ownership, i.e. of landed proprietorship under the Zamindari system and of peasant ownership under the ryotwari

system.<sup>16</sup> These units for the exaction of land revenue, in fact, characterise three sets of feudal relations. Under the Zamindari system, big landed estates or landlords collected revenue on a fixed basis for the British Raj by appropriating output produced by the peasants who cultivated land owned by its lords. Hence there existed landlord-peasant relations in agriculture. Under the ryotwari system, holding of the ryot (as prevalent in the Bombay and Madras Presidencies) was the unit for the exaction of land revenue. The ryots were in fact small feudal lords who, by and large, belonged to the Poligar families. The Poligars were appointed by the Monarchy as the in-charge of some villages for the purpose of land revenue collection. Hence the ryots had mixed picture about land relations in production. However, it was another form of feudalism. The system of village or communal ownership as the unit of land taxation had the village Zamindar or the communal group of land owners related to each other responsible for the payment of the given village's land revenue. In this case as well, the landlord-peasant relations in production existed as the characteristic of feudal society.

All the three systems testify to the existence of a socio-economic structure of production in British India wherein the landlords were dominating production or property relations on the basis of either their inherited landed aristocracy or enjoying colonial royalty or support. On the basis of the contemporary historical documents, Erik Komarov states : "Under each of the three basic land revenue systems the intensification of non-economic compulsion was an inherent feature of the exploitation



of the peasants. It was put into effect with all the power of the colonial state machine directly or by giving the feudal rights over the person and property of the peasants (private prisons and methods of torture of the Zamindars in Bengal, their treatment of rayats as serfs). In both cases the peasants were reduced virtually to serfdom, although this tendency was not observed in the same degree everywhere. Torture to exact rent or revenue was commonplace. In rayatwari areas the rayat was not only actually but, to a certain degree, also legally bound to the land, and the character of land cultivation was coercive. The situation was practically the same in Zamindari areas. In the Madras Presidency the law stated that a wealthy rayat could leave his land only if he found another rayat to replace him or agreed to occupy some other land taxable to the same amount as his previous land".<sup>17</sup> The process of the feudal exploitation of the peasants, the intensification of non-economic compulsion and other coercive measures made the peasants and labouring class bonded to the landlords and fully dependent on them.

The historical evolution and operation of the three-tier land revenue systems under the colonial rule also unveil a process of change in the feudal dominated agrarian relations in British India because of (a) the growth of commercial capitalism in metropolitan and other urban centres and (b) the extra-economic coercive methods to exploit the peasants by the colonialists coupled with the feudal exploitation of the peasants and the rural poor. The first led to the emergence and growth of traders, merchants, money-lenders and intermediaries who established marketing links



between urban and rural areas. Hence the countryside also experienced the growth of at least intermediaries, petty traders and money-lenders causing some changes in feudal relations.

The intensification of extra-economic coercive methods of peasant exploitation and the feudal exploitation of the peasants gradually turned into anti-feudal actions. The colonial state machinery had to introduce tenancy legislation for granting occupancy rights of land to the peasants by annulling the power of the landlords to sequester the property of the peasants. Such colonial action was helpless compulsion to contain the peasant uprisings and to raise the market value of land which had virtually fallen to a dismal point. Thus at the beginning of twentieth century, the process of commodity production (specially petty commodity producers) started to take place in the countryside. At the same time, the landlords were also using money-lending as a weapon to make the peasants bonded to them. All these forces - growth of commercial capitalism in urban areas, merchant-capital, money-lending and petty commodity producers brought about a process of transition in feudal rural India leading to the characteristics of semi-feudal social structure of production in the country. In other words, capitalism as an element of system moulding came into being which crumbled the dominant feudal relations. Thus the semi-feudal structure enwrapped the following : big landlords and intermediaries, traders and merchants as the fabrics of the dominant class structure in rural India.

But this is not the whole story of the class formation in British India. There also emerged two other classes : capitalist

or industrial bourgeoisie and elite middle class. The history of the colonial process of commercialisation and trade expansion shows how a capitalist class emerged from within the country and how an elite middle class was created through the expansion of colonial system of bureaucratic organisation with the evolution of a modern system of education in India. The capitalist class on the support of the colonial power or rule became the big owner of money, finance and then capital which led to a process of separation between urban and rural areas, capital and labour, industry and agriculture which finally bred up an ideology of private ownership of the means of production with the support of the colonial power, having linked to the international capitalist system of trade. The emerging middle class with the spurt of modern education helped in building a superstructure on the basis of capitalism as a system moulding element in the multi-structured economy of India. Hence the capitalist, landlords, merchants and elite middle class were the dominant conglomerates of the country in general and the landlords were still dominating in the semi-feudal structure of rural India.

There may not be much digression from the main theme, as discussed above, if the two social institutions - castes and Jajmani system - lasted for a long period of time in the history of agrarian evolution are briefly mentioned here for showing their interrelations in the feudal dominated structure of production in particular and in the emergence of capitalism as a system moulding element in general.

Castes and Jajmani system were the two major inextricable ordinates of village communities in India. The hierarchical pattern of castes which was originally a natural functional division manifested in the Jajmani system as a communal system or mode of distribution took a turn into the historical realities of a rigid social system strictly following the rules, customs, traditions, kinship, heredity and family in the whole of India. Such historical realities realised their social materialistic existence from the growth of landed property under feudalism wherein some castes - primarily upper layer like Brahmins and Rajput - dominated social relations in the process of material production; and other castes comprising peasants, artisans and servants remained subjugated to be dependent on them, or continued to be the clients of the feudal lords, showing a system of client-patron relationship, i.e. Jajmani system. In other words, the Jajmani system does not only symbolise a structure of social relations of personal dependence but also testifies to the creation of a social force to colour and maintain the caste system as a differentiated social structure of class relations, having the dominance of feudal lords in society. There were also some castes in between the upper and lower layers of the caste system which may also be grouped as a middle class, its function being a social link between these two social extremes. Thus the caste-based structure of feudal society was, in fact, class-based as the prevailing material relationships among castes in the process of production indicate. The Jajmani system continued as a mode of distribution (or as a system of communal cooperation)

in terms of barter between grains, and services and non-agricultural goods. This continued on the basis of castes as different occupational functionaries whose cooperation was a natural necessity.

The injunction of castes with Jajmani system, however, blurred the picture of class-based rural society; and with the given mode of production, a stubborn rigid social structure emerged in rural India. That is why Marx remarked : "The Asiatic form necessarily survives most stubbornly and for the longest time. This is due to its presupposition - that the individual does not become independent of the community; that there is a self-sustaining cycle of production, unity of agriculture and the handicrafts etc." <sup>18</sup>

The caste-bound framework of social structure also continued to exist in some or other during colonial rule. But its historical geneology shows that the landlords - a dominating class - mostly coming from the aristocratic or royal families - inherited and formulised their respective caste characteristics. These characteristics show that they mostly belonged to the upper layer of the caste system. The peasants were mostly backward castes and labourers coming from the lower layer of the caste system. At the close of the 19th century, specially after the enactment of Tenancy Law, the historical forces also converted some of landlords as peasants and some of the peasants as petty feudal landlords. Hence the history of such social inter-course produced some distortions in the feudal dominated structure of rural society. But on the whole, the landlords were mostly higher castes. All this shows that the class-caste characteristics were the same, except

in the case of maintaining kinship and hereditary family relations which were always perceived by social anthropologists in the form of a caste system.

The trading and merchant classes which emerged during the colonial rule were from the Vaishya or business communities, such as Marwaris and Gujaratis. The historical documents show that some of big merchants and bankers who emerged in the Bombay and Calcutta Presidencies, were from these communities having ancestral links with the 'Rajahs' and other feudal lords. They had a dual function to play, apart from their business : (i) to act like an agent between the State and its ruling class; and (ii) between the ruling class and the people at the grass-root. In this way, they maintained or changed their ideology at the occasions arising out from the historical process of change. Lieutenant-Colonel W.H. Sleeman declared : "There is no class of men more interested in the stability of our rule in India than that of the respectable merchants; nor is there any upon whom the welfare of our Government, and of the people, more depends".<sup>19</sup> Thus the traders, merchants and bankers were a part of the existing class basis of ideology and social development.

The elite middle class, which emerged from the colonial system of bureaucratic organisation with the spurt of modern education were the people from the upper castes (Brahmins in particular in the case of the Madras Presidency) and also helped in sustaining a superstructure at the base of the colonial mode of production operating in urban areas and the feudal mode of production operating in the countrysides. Hence the people of this class were



also a part of the ruling class basis of ideology and social development, as they came from landlord and trading-cum-merchant communities. All this shows that the castes were superficial social boundaries but deliberately maintained as a rigid social system based on the kinship, traditional and customary practices of intra-family social intercourses. Hence the class characteristics were the basis of social development and the caste stratifications were the basis of sustaining superstitious fabrics of social system.

### III Policy, Programmes and Class Relations

The long continuing colonial process of plunder, loot, and exploitation aroused the impulse of nationalism among the people of India and finally, the wave of the National Movement gathered its momentum and strength for compelling British Raj to hand over its sovereign power to the people of India on 15 August 1947. Before discussing one of the aspects of the main theme in this section, it is equally important to show what socio-economic structure of production was and which class or classes dominated its material production relations on the eve of the Independence. The foregoing section shows the growth of capitalism as a system-moulding element with the existence of semi-feudalism in rural India. The growth of capitalism as a system-moulding indicated an increasing dominance of industrial capitalist class, a process of separation between agriculture and industry, differentiation between urban and rural areas, and growing trade and market relations with their distinct spatial differences. It was, thus, natural for that element to influence the economic conditions



of production in rural areas. Hence there predominantly existed semi-feudal social structure of production wherein the feudal lords - big and petty - dominated the material production relations with a multitude of poor peasants and labourers depending on them. The superimposed caste system on the class-based rural society was also present on the eve of the Independence. Some of the stubborn characteristics of the village community in the shape of the Jajmani system were also carried over from the past. The basic fabric of the colonial system of bureaucracy also remained in tact. In a sense, all the institutional fabrics of the British Raj remained interwoven in India on the eve of her Independence. 4580

The framework of a political economy emerging from the Constitution of Independent India presupposes the existence of individualism, political democracy and private ownership of property as the means of all social development and socialism as the end of this development. The Fundamental Rights of the Constitution sanctioned the former (i.e. individualism, democracy and private ownership of property and the Directive Principles of State Policy attempted to realise the goal of socialism (or called as growth with social justice). The State is assumed to play a catalytic role to harmonise antagonistic relations between the means and the end. Thus the constitutional framework of the political economy of post-Independent India basically drawn on the premises of capitalism for securing socialism by the State is, in fact, a product of the historical realities of the class-based ideological forces of the National Movement struggles for the Process of National Self-Determination. Lenin's theory of National Self-Determination

shows how socialist thought appears an important feature in the process of national self-determination : "For the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market and there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language . . . unity and unimpeded development of language are the most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commerce on a scale commensurate with modern capitalism . . . for the establishment of a close connection between the market and each and every proprietor, big or little, and between seller and buyer. Therefore the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of national states, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied . . . for the entire civilised world, the national state is typical . . . consequently if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations . . . we must inevitably reach the conclusion that self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien bodies, and the formation of an independent national state".<sup>20</sup> Hence there is no wonder if the political economy of India is constitutionally established to maintain and generate such an aggregate of socio-economic relations in material production by the State for bringing about socialism through the development of capitalism.

The foregoing section shows the emergence of capitalism as a system-moulding element and the existence of semi-feudalism in agriculture. Hence the semi-feudal structure of the rural society, being the main core of the national economy and its overall development, continued to be the major obstacle to the development

of capitalism in India. Alternatively, it also means that the existence of semi-feudalism was also the major stumbling block to the process of rural development. By recognising these facts, the process of planning in India started with the twin objectives of development - industrialisation and rural development. The objective of industrialisation has been the expansion of the 'modern capitalist sector' which reproduces productive capital for investment leading to the growth of capital accumulation and the introduction and adoption of technological changes.<sup>21</sup> But the success of industrial development (i.e. the capitalist sector expansion) depends on the size of home market which, in turn, depends on the growth of commodity production in agriculture. Hence a suitable strategy of planning for rural development is required for changing the semi-feudal system of production into a capitalist mode of production. This process of change depends on the creation of such a socio-economic structure of production which could breed a class, i.e. capitalist, for introducing new forces of production in agriculture. The emerging new class in production would lead to a dominant mode of production which gradually results in the growth of commodity production, extension in the size of market, investible surpluses and so finally, in the expansion of the modern sector.

All these facts may be reckoned with, in some form or other, in the official Plan documents of the Government. Ranjit Sau<sup>22</sup> has characterised the official strategies of planning for rural development as the integral and differential strategies for rural development. According to him the integral strategy followed from

1951-52 to 1964-65 had its three major planks : (a) land reform, (b) cooperative farming and (c) community development. His classification of the differential strategy which marks, a turning point with a new phase of rural development since 1965-66 consists of the new agricultural strategy, special policy and programmes for developing and improving the productive and socio-economic conditions of the poor peasants, tenants, landless labour and artisans. In addition to these two characteristic strategies, the third may also be added, i.e. integrated rural development which encompasses the essence of both, integral and differential strategies with an added emphasis on the spatial units of planning for rural development. This has gained popularity in rural India after the publication of the blue-print of the World Bank on 'The Assault on World Poverty' in 1972.

The first strategy "was largely informed by the Gandhian concept of a peasant economy composed of small and medium peasantry, tied together with a spirit of mutual cooperation and a profound outlook for the development of all".<sup>23</sup> Thus the objective of this strategy was to integrate all three planks of planning for reconstructing and reorganising the rural economy for producing such a socio-economic structure of production in agriculture wherein the peasant mode of production could emerge leading to the growth of petty-commodity production in agriculture, an essential condition needed for the development of capitalism. 'A tacit assumption of harmony between production, employment and the removal of poverty' was also held in this strategy.

The main objective of various land reforms and tenancy measures introduced in different states of the country was to create conditions for changing the existing agrarian social structure in a manner to make it conducive to the growth in agricultural production. Hence the abolition of the Zamindari System and other intermediaries, procurement of excess land above ceiling size of holdings, and the conferment of ownership right in land on the tenants crumbled the strong edifice of feudal lord-peasant relations in production by converting feudal form of landed property into private ownership of property and by compelling the landowners for the resumption of self-cultivation in rural India. In this way, such measures created potentials for the genesis of small commodity production as one of the essential requirements for the development of capitalism in agriculture. But the resultant peasant economy could not remove the element of monopoly in land. Marx says : "The division of landed property negates the large scale monopoly of property in land - abolishes it; but only by generating this monopoly. It does not abolish the source of monopoly, private property. It attacks the existing form, but not the essence of monopoly".<sup>24</sup> Hence land as a source of monopoly continued to exist in the peasant society despite the enactment and implementations of land reform and tenancy acts in different parts of the country.

"The second plank of the integrated strategy for agrarian development was the cooperative movement, embracing all the aspects of farming - production, input supply, marketing of produce etc. The declared aim was to cover the entire village



land under the cooperative responsibility of the community".<sup>25</sup>

In pursuance to this objective, the Gandhian model of cooperative farming was experimented at certain places; but it could not succeed in practice because of antagonistic class-caste relations in land-cum-production.<sup>26</sup> It only remained a show-piece at the hands of some Gandhians on the official support of the state. However, the cooperative movement embracing other aspects of farming such as credit and fertilizer supply and marketing of produce had been a success because of the entry of rich peasants, traders and merchants and bankers into different cooperative institutions which proved to be a powerful organic machinery to sustain and exercise their power in the given set-up of democracy. The other cause for the success of this movement in these fields had been also the state's support and the development of marketing and trade links between urban and rural areas.

The idea of community development, the third plank of the integral strategy started in 1952, aimed at arousing the impulse of planning for agrarian development among the people in villages by undertaking a package of programmes touching all aspects of rural life such as agriculture, irrigation, communication, education, health, housing, training, supplementing employment and social welfare. For this end, the BDO, a unit of administration assumed the charge for delivering the multi-pronged objective of the community development programme and the role of local leadership was felt necessary, in addition to the BDO. The success or failure of this programme need not be retold, except that its contributions to the process of monetisation in rural areas through various channels and to the rebuilding of a class in the structure of rural power.



It may not be out of the context if irrigation projects and IADP (Intensive Agricultural District Programmes) are also mentioned here and included in the integral strategy of planning for agrarian development. The purpose of both had been to intensify farming in rural India. Irrigation, one of the important productive forces, is essential for the development of agriculture in the agrarian economy. And so, the provision of irrigation to assure water supply for crop cultivation for increasing production and employment has always been one of the major activities in the plan documents. Added to this, modern inputs like HYV and fertilizer are also needed for the development of agriculture, because 'agrarianism' characterising the use of traditional agricultural pursuits has always been viewed as one of the major causes for the persistence of underdevelopment and backwardness in rural areas.<sup>27</sup> But the use of these inputs cannot be made popular all of a sudden. Hence the Intensive Agricultural District Programmes were launched to demonstrate the high-yielding effects of these inputs in rural areas. Again, given the structure of the peasant economy, the idea behind these programmes was to create productive conditions for the development of agriculture in India.

All these aspects of the integral strategy actually aimed at creating conditions to overcome semi-feudalism which was arresting the development of capitalism in agriculture. But the operations of the integrated strategy could not succeed in transforming the semi-feudal structure of production in rural areas, despite the erosion of the colonial base of feudal relations. This was due to two factors : (a) low productivity of labour in agriculture, and (b)

growth of intermediate structures such as money-lenders, merchants and middlemen. The productivity of labour remains low because of the continuing use of traditional agricultural practices and pursuits. The increasing number of cooperative societies of different types led to the intensification of intermediate structures in rural areas wherein the landlords also played an important moneylending role. As a result, the peasant economy based on family labour-farming remained subsistence producer and under the bondage of indebtedness to the landlords, moneylenders and merchants. Hence the Gandhian idea of a peasant economy was not realised nor the development of capitalism in agriculture.

The differential strategy for rural development was a distinct package of development efforts for the promotion of capitalism in Indian agriculture. The strategy also included special policy programmes and protective measures. The objective of the special policy programmes like SFDA and MFADA was to make small and marginal farms viable units of production. The protective measures like CREP and other public works programme aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural poor, specially landless labour by providing casual employment to them. In other words, the purpose of the special policy programmes was to sustain the characteristics of a self-content peasant economy with the infusion of money into the rural areas for extending the process of value-in-exchange through the Keynesian type of public works programmes.

The spurt of new technology with a package of modern inputs in agriculture, which was one of the planks of the differential strategy succeeded in bringing about the so-called 'Green Revolution'

in Indian agriculture. This revolution was, at least, a success in the irrigated areas in general and in the wheat irrigated areas in particular. The spurt of the new technology raised the productivity of labour in Indian agriculture. But the surpluses resulting from this increase in productivity while wage rate remaining low, accrued to those who were large landholders. As a result, the green revolution era witnessed to a process of growth in income equalities at the intra-farm level, but being different in different areas. There is a massive literature to bear an evidence to this fact. There was also an obvious impact of this change (i.e. new technologies) on the structures of land, labour and product markets in rural areas. The value of land shot up quite high and the land-lease market witnessed to the emergence of tenants from dominant class of farmers.<sup>28</sup> This effect was also partly due to increasing cost of farm production and partly due to absentee landlordism in certain areas. The consequent rate of rise in ground rent from the new technology restricted the small traditional peasants to cultivate land on lease and so it was also a cause for the same effect. The rural labour market experienced growth of wage labour in agriculture. An increase in marketable surplus of agricultural commodities resulting from the new technology extended the size of home market in rural areas. And so, capital in terms of productive assets also took place, despite spending a major part of surpluses on unproductive consumption. The liberal credit policy also helped in the growth of productive assets. But all this happened to those who were mostly large landholders. All these markets - commodity, labour and credit - being inter-locking at the land-base were interrelated to production

relations. In this system of interlocking market and production relations, during the Sixties progressive large farmers commanded the position of dominance in the agrarian economy. The existing intermediate structures were, however, also maintained for exploiting the poor peasants and landless labourers. And so the small and marginal peasants could not become viable producers as the special policy programmes aimed at doing so.

The post-1965 era also witnessed to the collapse of the Jajmani system which was the source to maintain social relations of personal dependence. The collapse of this system was obvious due to the expansion of monetisation and commodity production. But the emerging rich peasants, the dominant class, had to create certain conditions to pauperise the poor peasants and landless labour. Hence in the post-1965 era, money-lending and low wage rate maintained by the substitution of capital for labour, high ground rent and the use of family labour were the sources of pauperising them in the rural society. The other extra-economic source was the maintenance of caste-oriented traditions, customs and practices. In this way, dependency, i.e. the reproduction of paupers also continued. Thus the spurt of the new technology witnessed the emergence of a class-capitalist or progressive farmers - in the large farm sector of the agrarian economy varying from one area to another. High ground rent, money-lending, low wage payment and traditional social hierarchy continued to remain as the factors responsible for the reproduction of poor peasants, tenants and landless labours.

Before discussing the third strategy for agrarian development

(i.e. integrated rural development) let the following be mentioned for the sake of maintaining analytical continuity : firstly, the operation of the differential strategy led to the development of capitalist agriculture on the socio-economic infrastructures prepared during operations of the Integral Strategy at the colonial base of semi-feudalism which existed at the close of the British Raj; secondly, capitalism as system-moulding element occupied the place or role of its dominance in the agrarian economy but it also remained restrictive in effects because of the resistance put up by earlier modes of production or their elements against the development of capitalism in agriculture in its social formations.<sup>29</sup> The prevailing high ground rents, low wage rate, the mechanism of money-lending and trade and the traditional hierarchy of the village society were the forces which restricted the development of capitalism in agriculture; the effects of which vary from one region to another and from one area to another within a given region. Hence the State as the catalyst of social development had to remove these restrictive effects or forces. Moreover, such role was also expected to be played from the side of the State under the banner of socialism. Hence legislative measures were adopted by different State Governments to regulate agricultural wages and to remove the poor peasants and landless labourers from the clutch of moneylenders to whom they were indebted. But these measures were not enough to protect them from wheels of exploitation because of the extra-coercive forces created in the multi-structured economy of rural India.

The dialectics of the State between capitalism as the means of social development and socialism as the end of this development



resorted to the third strategy (i.e. integrated rural development) of planning for agrarian development. The concept of integrated rural development means two things<sup>30</sup> : (a) differentiation of rural areas as spatial units of planning based on the developmental importance of activities from the point of view of local resources, skills and needs; and (b) integration of activities in the spatial process of planning for rural development. A tacit assumption of this strategy is to create a self-generating process of income and employment at the household level through clustering a group of villages on the basis of 'growth centre' approach at the block or district level. The official idea behind the operation of this strategy is to reduce regional imbalances, inequalities and backwardness by generating income and employment on a self-sustained basis. Hence all household and village cottage industries are also included in this strategy. In fact, the main purpose of their inclusion in this strategy is to grow petty-commodity producers who still form a major gap existing in the development of capitalism in agriculture. Moreover, the state has to show its metal in bringing about socialism through the capitalist path of development in rural areas. This is possible if the development of household-based industrial activities takes place and provides a built-in link between two enterprises - agriculture and industry and thereby it reduces the urban-rural dichotomy. But the chances to provide such link between agriculture and industry through the integrated development programme of household and village industries seem to be bleak at this moment because the capitalist process of development is still in transition in many parts of rural India due to the resist-



ance put up by the earlier modes of production or their elements against the process of capitalist transformation of agriculture. Hence the efforts of the State to develop household and village industries on the basis of cooperative society formation of village artisans may lead to the pauperisation of the artisans because of the entry of capitalists from urban areas finding such ventures profitable with the marketability of the products in rural areas.<sup>31</sup> There are also many cases which show the entry of rich peasants and traders with their capital into the undertaking of industrial activities like oilseeds industry at the household level and their entry with subsidies from the State has thrown traditional oil more out of the race in the villages.<sup>32</sup> As a result, they are pauperised without having land or a minimum size of productive assets.

The spatial process of planning for integrated rural development also implies the diversification of socio-economic activities in the process of rural development for releasing the pressures of excess or surplus population on agriculture. Hence the development of activities allied to agriculture such as dairying, sericulture, etc. is stressed for developing rural areas. The development of dairy in certain areas based on the system of cooperation has generated additional source of income in those areas. But dairy development being still land-based is not separate from agriculture and so it has helped the rich or progressive large farmers in strengthening the position of their dominance in a number of ways. The case of dairy development in Karnataka bears an evidence to this fact.<sup>33</sup> In many States, dairy development as a part of integrated rural development is still conspicuous because of the

dominant traditional hierarchy of the rural society and due to lack of rail road and communication development. This is also due to lack of initiative on the part of the State Governments. The success of dairy development in the regions like Gujarat, Karnataka, Punjab and Delhi shows that developing capitalist agriculture has been a factor for its success there. The reasons for the capitalist development of their agriculture need not be retold and repeated. This example also indicates that the success of the integrated rural development programme firstly depends on the development of capitalism in agriculture, i.e. the emergence and growth of progressive rich peasants. But when such programme is introduced in the capitalist developing agricultural areas, the rich peasants' entry gets institutionalised and as a result, the poor peasants and landless labour do not compete with them rather they fall in their hold. And so, the growing hold of the rich peasants makes them dependent.

All the three strategies for rural development reflect the efforts of the State in moulding the colonial creation of semi-feudalism into the development of capitalism in rural India. But all such efforts appear to be caught under their own contradictions which arise from the dialectical relations of the State between capitalism as the means of development and socialism as the end of that development. The former depends on the creation of suitable economic conditions (i.e. technological changes and progressive class of rural population). Once the efforts are made by the State in this direction, heterogeneous class relations and interests cut across themselves at different points of time with conflicts and

clashes. As a result, the efforts produce restrictive effects of capitalist development in various forms and run through in different phases in different orders in rural areas. Given the constitutional framework of the political economy of India and so the characteristic pattern of State relations between the means and the end of social development, the socio-economic structure of production emerging from the operations of the different strategies of planning for rural development exposingly enwraps the following classes : (a) rural oligarchs (comprising rich peasants and landlords), (b) merchants and traders, (c) middle group of peasants, (d) poor peasants, landless labourers and artisans. The rural oligarchs occupy a place of dominance in rural areas as they command the main element of social material relationships in production in Indian agriculture. The merchants and traders are next to them in commanding order because they deal with the flow of marketable surplus of agricultural commodities produced in agriculture. That is why at one point, the interests of this class clash with those of the rural oligarchs but at some other point, both of them have to compromise with one another for keeping the last class under the clutch of their control. The middle peasants look forward to the rural oligarchs in anticipation of becoming their partners in the structure of power holding. But this speculation is not without causing the feelings of subordination to them and so it has led to uprisings among the people of this class who mostly come from the backward caste communities.<sup>34</sup> The people belonging to the last class constitute a vast mass of rural population and they continue to remain dependent on the rural oligarchs and also on the merchants and traders who reproduce condi-

tions to pauperise them. The reproduction of pauperisation conditions is, thus, a product of the dominance of the rural oligarchy in the operations of rural development resulting from the characteristic pattern of State relations between the means and end of that development.

#### IV Why Rural Poor Remain Poor?

The characteristic pattern of the State relations between the means and the end of social development, as historically formed and determined from the part at the colonial base of semi-feudalism or socio-economic formations, produces a class basis of development in rural India. The class basis of development shows the existence of 'dominant material relationships', producing a dominant or ruling ideology of development (i.e. capitalism as the means of social development and socialism as the end of this development). And so, the economic conditions show how the rural oligarchs, traders and merchants strengthen the position of their dominance by dominating the material forces of the society; and how the poor peasants, landless labourers and artisans are reproduced by their dominant material relationships in production. The rural poor are reproduced by the dominant class (or classes), because its dominance in the socio-economic structure of production creates extra-economic conditions or compulsions to make the rural poor dependent on the dominant class. Hence the emerging conditions from the dialectical relations of the State between the means and the end of social development are responsible for the reproduction of poor (i.e. poverty in rural India).

The reproduction of rural poverty has its two forms - 'natural' and 'artificial'. The natural form of its reproduction is due to a low level of development of productive forces and due to the existence of semi-feudal relations in production which also characterise 'social relations of personal dependence' in village society. Hence according to P.C. Joshi, "the conflict between the rich and the poor does not assume a naked form because of the mystification of this conflict by the institutions of caste, village community etc."<sup>35</sup> The emergence of 'artificial' form of poverty is the product of the capitalist process of transformation. This process reproduces poverty by converting petty property owners into a property-less class; and its growth outruns the growth of wage labour for a long period, 'indicating pauperisation without proletarianisation'. The capitalist process of transformation also reproduces artificial poverty or pauperises the rural poor by making terms and conditions or contractual modes of tenancy, loan and wage payment more favourable to the rich peasants or capitalist landlords (i.e. rural oligarchs) than to the poor peasants and landless labourers. The prevailing characteristics of land, credit-inputs, labour and commodity markets, which function and operate under the influence of the rural oligarchs, also favour them in dictating all such terms and conditions.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the dominant capitalist production relations correspondingly reproduce dependent agrarian relations leading to the pauperisation of the poor peasants and hired landless labourers. Thus artificial rural poverty accentuates as the product of the capitalist class basis of a rural development. All the parts of rural India have not equally experienced the process of capitalist



transformation and so artificial poverty is accentuated in the midst of natural poverty in rural India.

The class basis of rural development also shows how the prevailing characteristics of land, labour, credit, input and commodity markets are getting all the sections of rural population into 'a vortex of capitalism'.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, it also reflects the dominance of landlord-capitalist in rural areas; having monopolistic control over the supply of land and other productive assets and resources, the supply of agricultural output and its marketable surplus, and flow of institutional credit and modern inputs. Table 1 shows that the well-to-do peasants constituting 10.34 per cent of the total number of rural households operate more than half of the total area, hold 61 per cent of the total assets, obtain about half of the total flow of credit, command about 63 per cent of the gross value of output and 67 per cent of the total amount of marketable surplus. The same table also characterises their credit-worthiness, technical dynamism and commercial behaviour. The poor peasants and landless labourers who constitute a little more than 60 per cent of the total number of rural households cut a sorry figure in all respects. In this way, the same table displays the characteristic features of dominant and dependent agrarian production relations in rural India which are the result of the class basis of development owing to the characteristic relations of the State between the means and the end of social development, having formed at the colonial base of socio-economic formations.

Table - 1

## Characteristics of Dominant and Dependent Agrarian Relations

	Poor Pea- sants (0 - 2.49 Acres)	Small Peasants (2.50 - 9.99 Acres)	Well-to-do Peasants (10 Acres and above)
1. Households (No.) <sup>a</sup> (Per cent)	48.2 60.26	23.6 29.50	8.2 10.24
2. Area operated (%) <sup>a</sup>	9.25	37.55	53.20
3. Assets distribution (%) <sup>b</sup>	3.00	36.00	61.00
4. Outstanding debt (%) <sup>b</sup>	21.50	34.90	43.60
5. Distribution of cash debt among cultivator households <sup>b</sup>			
a. Institutional agencies	5.7	28.6	65.7
b. Non-institutional agencies	18.5	40.3	41.2
c. Both combined	14.4	36.6	49.0
6. Fixed capital formation by cultivators (%) <sup>c</sup>			
a. Households	41.0	52.6	6.4
b. Total capital formation	8.3	46.2	45.5
7. Purpose-wise credit requirements by cultivator household (%) <sup>b</sup>			
a. Fixed capital expenditure	19.0	32.6	52.9
b. Working capital expenditure	10.6	14.8	19.0
c. Household expenditure	61.0	44.8	25.7
8. Gross value of output (%) <sup>d</sup>	10.5	26.9	62.6
9. Share of marketable surplus (%) <sup>d</sup>	5.4	27.8	66.8
10. Irrigation (%) <sup>e</sup>	15.09	38.98	45.93
11. Area under commercial crops as per- centage of gross cropped area <sup>e</sup>	16.90	19.74	26.37

Sources : (a) NSS, 27th Round (1971-72); (b) All India Rural Debt and Investment Survey (1971-72), RBI; (c) All India Rural Debt and Investment Survey (1961-62), RBI; (d) "Contributions to the Output and Marketable Surplus of Agricultural Products by Cultivating Groups in India : 1960-61", Utsa Patnaik, EPW, December 27, 1975; and (e) Agricultural Census of India, 1970-71, Government of India.

Note : Relation Between Holding Size Groups and Asset-holding Groups

<u>Holding Group</u> <u>(in Acres)</u>	<u>Asset Group</u> <u>(in Rupees)</u>
a. 0 - 2.49	0 - 2,500
b. 2.50 - 9.99	2,500 - 20,000
c. 10 and Above	20,000 and Above

An answer to the question, 'why rural poor remain poor', thus, does not lie in Lipton's thesis of urban-bias development<sup>38</sup> nor in theory of rural fundamentalism.<sup>39</sup> The theoretical framework of 'Agrarianism, Dualism and Development' is also incapable of answering this question.<sup>40</sup> On the contrary, all these theoretical explanations have led to posing the question of rural poverty as one of rural Vs urban, caste Vs caste, ruralism Vs industrialism. All these dichotomies in "the Indian context perform the ideological function of a mystifying force, keeping the poor in darkness about the social genesis of poverty and thus, thwarting their emergence as a socially conscious force".<sup>41</sup> The social genesis of poverty could be found from an inquiry into historical process of socio-economic formations which exist today from the past.

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